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Remarks/Arguments:

This is a reply to the office action of August 9.

We have added the subject matter of claim 20 (now canceled) to claim 18, and have made some minor editorial changes as well.

Kramer discloses a device for *levitational guidance* of a continuous web. In order to levitate the web, Kramer needs to activate blowing nozzles on both sides of the web, so that the web is guided along the apparatus. In Kramer's apparatus, it would be disadvantageous if the web would be blown through by the treatment medium, as the levitational effect would be reduced.

With the present invention, as recited in amended claim 18, an important feature is that the treatment medium can be blown through the entire thickness of the fiber composite. As this feature is shown neither by Kramer nor by any of the other cited documents, claim 18 is novel over the cited prior art.

Inasmuch as claim 18 is novel, the dependent claims 19 and 21 - 28 are novel as well over the cited prior art.

The invention described by amended claim 18 is not only novel, but also non-obvious over Kramer. Kramer shows an apparatus for levitational guidance of a material web. The air has to be blown on the web from both sides of the web continuously to maintain levitation. Thus, it is neither possible nor desired for the air to be blown through the entire thickness of the web. This is particularly important, if a thick material were to be guided.

In contrast, it is an object of the present invention to provide an apparatus and a method for *consolidating* fiber composite even in the case of a thick material. As a

fiber composite is loose before being consolidated, it is not adapted to be guided in a levitational way. Thus someone skilled in the art would not consider Kramer to solve the above problem. Even if he were to consult Kramer to solve the problem, he would not find any advice on how to consolidate the material through its entire thickness.

Therefore, the invention of claim 18 is not obvious from Kramer and it follows that claims 19 and 21 - 28 are nonobvious as well. The other references of record do not overcome Kramer's shortcomings as a reference.

Claim 29 was rejected as being anticipated by De Vroome (US 6058626). The applicant respectfully traverses this rejection.

De Vroome discloses a dryer for a material web, the dryer having a reduced energy consumption. It is used for drying the *surfaces* of a web material (col. 6, lines 58 - 59).

Contrary to this, in the method according to claim 29 the treatment medium is blown *through the entire thickness* of the fiber composite. This feature is neither shown by De Vroome nor by any of the other cited documents. Consequently, claim 29 is deemed novel over the cited prior art.

As claim 29 is novel, the dependent claims 30 to 34 are novel as well.

Claim 29 is also not obvious from De Vroome. The invention of De Vroome relates to a method of reducing energy consumption of a dryer. It is only mentioned in passing that the surface of a material is dried in this dryer. This reference leads away from the present invention, where it is a specific object to treat a fiber composite over its entire thickness. Therefore, De Vroome gives no advice to someone skilled in the art, on solving this problem.

Accordingly, we submit that claim 29 is not obvious from De Vroome (or from the other prior art, which is no more pertinent than De Vroome), and that the claims which depend from claim 29 are nonobvious as well.

We believe that the claims now presented are patentable over the prior art, and that the application is in proper form for allowance.

Respectfully submitted,



Charles W. Fallow
Reg. No. 28,946

Shoemaker and Mattare, Ltd.
10 Post Office Road
Silver Spring, MD 20910
(301) 589-8900

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